alberta pork production handbook

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Alberta
AGRICULTURE
Pork Industry Branch

MANAGEMENT OF THE LARGE FARROW-TO-FINISH OPERATION

INCLUDING:

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A. Management

The management of an operation may involve planning, organizing, staffing, giving direction and controlling the operation:

Planning is deciding in advance what is to be done. It is decision making, involving choosing between alternatives and setting objectives.

Organizing means grouping activities and resources in an orderly and productive way.

Staffing involves getting the right people to do the work.

Directing means getting action started and moving in the right direction, as well as guiding and supervising actions.

Controlling is ensuring that results are consistent with plans, or what is desired. This includes making changes to operations as results are obtained.

A common tendency is for the hog producer to be a "doer", preferring to be in the barn doing the chores, not in the office "managing". The management task is essential to the well being of any unit. It is particularly important in the large farrow-to-finish operation. Producers may feel management is something that can be done on the run and think time spent looking at records, planning future budgets and future actions in the unit is non-productive. Often what is done today is a direct result of plans that were made perhaps a year ago. Good management is a product of good planning.

B. Records

A good record system is important on an operation of any size in order to carry out the management task. On a large operation it is essential. Record keeping is a discipline that needs work and development. Few persons have natural skills at keeping swine records. Many do develop strong recording habits over time. The better the records, the better the pictures they draw, and the better the answers they can then give. Good records will always generate questions: Why did we do better (or worse) this month? Why are our preweaning death losses down? These questions will often generate ideas for keeping better records.

Records must be easy to keep, complete and simple to access and analyse. Record keeping in itself is of no use unless one analyses and uses the records on a regular basis.

Smaller units may have simple hand-written records, while larger units may use complex computerized systems. Computers are now relatively cheap and easy to operate. The programs available for record keeping in the swine unit provide a large amount of information. Properly used, the computer will help improve productivity and thus profitability.

All record systems should contain:

Breeding Records

- Which sow was bred?
- Which boar was used to breed her?

- When was she bred?
- When will she farrow?
- When will she be due to return to service?
- When is she due for a pregnancy check?

Sow and Litter Records

These record the numbers of pigs born alive, born dead and weaned. They should also show a medical history of the sow and the litters up to weaning. They will show ID's of the sows, the boars and individual pigs in the litters, if these have been recorded.

Sow Summary

The sow summary card should show the sow's life history. It should record all the sow's litters, with breeding, farrowing and weaning dates. This information is essential for good planning and the generation of a positive breeding program.

Barn Production Record

This should be a daily diary of what happens in the barn, and is particularly useful in the farrowing, weaning and breeding areas. A daily inventory of all stock in the unit will be generated from the daily barn sheet. See table 1. Weekly Barn Record.

Feeder Barn Record

This record shows inputs and outputs of pigs and feed in the grower and feeder areas. It must show death losses in these areas and a daily inventory of stock.

For those with smaller units, the Alberta Swine Record System provides all these records. Any district office of Alberta Agriculture or a regional swine specialist can provide the instructional brochure and a binder with forms.

Computerized Record Keeping Systems

Computers can generate the necessary records. In addition they have the great advantage of instant recall from the memory bank and immense calculating potential for records such as boar performance summaries. Many computer systems now provide graphic summaries as part of their records. These are much easier and quicker to read than columns of figures alone, which helps considerably with management decisions.

A computerized record keeping package consists of the hardware (the equipment to run the program) and the software (the program of record keeping). Both hardware and software are available in forms suitable for the small and the large producer.

Many producers prefer to have easily accessible data right at their fingertips and wish to purchase their own relatively inexpensive systems. The cost can be recovered from improved production. Other producers may not feel comfortable with computerized systems, preferring a "bureau" system to do their records. Details of the events on the unit are sent on coded forms to the firm operating the "bureau", which enters them into the record keeping program, the accumulated data is returned as printouts to the producer. This means some delay from the gathering of the data to its compilation, but a good bureau system should be able to get information back on the farm in a week to ten days. Some use facsimile for rapid transmission of results.

Federal-Provincial Sow Productivity and Management Program

This joint program of Alberta Agriculture and Agriculture Canada offers producers a standard computerized system of recording that gives sow, boar and herd analyses. Producers fill in sow record cards which are mailed to Edmonton for processing. Records on individual sows and on the main herd are generated and returned to the producer.

For further information contact the Pork Industry Branch, Alberta Agriculture, at:

#204, 7000-113 Street
EDMONTON, Alberta
T6H 5T6
Phone: 427-5319

Bureau Systems

Two major breeding companies that provide bureau systems in Alberta for their clients are:

Pig Improvement Canada, Acme, Alberta with "Pig Tales"

National Pig Development, Humboldt, Saskatchewan with "Easi-Care".

Home System

For those wishing to operate their own system, a program from the University of Minnesota, Pig Champ is recommended. It is also offered as a bureau system by some professionals.

Further details about these and other programs can be obtained from regional swine specialists.

C. Management and Supervision of Barn Staff

Staff in the barns must be proficient at pig husbandry, and have the skills necessary to perform the job and get good results. On a large operation with more than one or two employees it is also important that they work well as a team. The team concept is vital on the larger unit, everyone has both a direct responsibility for his own particular job, and an indirect responsibility for the smooth running of the whole operation. The manager should establish routines for each area of the operation to best co-ordinate the total operation. The routines outlined in tables 2 and 3 may be useful as a guide when planning an operation.

D. Management and Supervision of Office Staff

On the larger operation, the office staff and a well planned, well run office are extremely important. Office staff need to know about ordering of supplies, processing of accounts and also barn operations. A good knowledge

of barn routines and procedures helps them in their job. This is particularly important if they are responsible for data entry in a computerized record keeping program. Office routines to receive and process raw data from the barns will have to be set up.

Financial records can also be computerized where a hardware package is already available on the farm by obtaining the proper software.

E. Management and Supervision of Feed Programs

The larger swine operation often has its own feed processing facility. Today, these facilities are highly sophisticated. Management planning must include adequate training for feed mill operators, and regular planning sessions with other farm staff and outside resource people such as the nutritionist and the feed supplier. Routines for maintenance, analysis procedures and feed checks need to be established.

F. Management and Supervision of Herd Health Programs

A herd health program is essential to the survival of the large operation. The program needs good communication amongst the manager, barn staff and the veterinarian. Barn staff must understand and accept routine medication procedures. They must know the importance of following directions in the use of drugs and the reasons for recommended withdrawal times. Today many veterinarians run computerized record keeping programs for their clients. These are essential for effective monitoring of herd health.

G. Management and Supervision of Maintenance Programs

The high capital cost of barns, equipment and machinery make a regular program of service and maintenance essential. The larger unit will employ regular maintenance staff who may also take a role in feed processing. The barn staff can then use their time more productively with the animals. Routine checks on water, feed, ventilation, heat and sewage systems should be part of maintenance responsibilities. These should be co-ordinated with regular barn staff, who may do small running repairs without having to wait for the maintenance staff. Maintenance staff must report specialized or lengthy work to the manager and co-ordinate it to ensure that it minimizes the disruption of regular operations.

Records on all barns and major pieces of equipment need to be maintained. This keeps a check on potential problem areas, and enables you to validate warranties on equipment when necessary.

Outside facilities such as dugouts, wells, sewage lagoons, water and sewer lines, electric cables and stand-by plants need to be checked on a regular basis.

Seasonal routines for pre-winter and pre-summer maintenance of most systems should be laid down. Maintenance staff should be responsible for these and for jobs such as snow clearance on main access roads and operation of death pits, incinerators and garbage areas.

Major works such as new building and works calling for specialized knowledge should be contracted out to avoid major disruptions of daily staff routines. This avoids unnecessary delays in getting essential jobs done quickly and efficiently. Apparent cost savings in "doing jobs ourselves" are often lost in time and interest payments if prolonged or put off until the staff "have time".

Only qualified staff should carry out electrical and gas maintenance work. Know and follow provincial and municipal codes and regulations.

H. Incentive Programs and Staff Relations

The operation of a large unit depends on staff teamwork and co-operation. Staff morale is vital to teamwork. Working conditions are important to morale; areas such as wash and lunch rooms must be spotless; designated staff are needed to get this done.

Incentives can be important to staff. Management and staff work these out. An incentive program should give a tangible benefit to the employee, and must be easily monitored and administered. Some employees may not need added incentive to perform well, but that doesn't mean that their attainments shouldn't be rewarded. An incentive award will accomplish this, and offer a "carrot" to the employee who needs that extra motivation.

In breeding and farrowing areas, the conception rate, pigs born alive per litter, pigs reared per litter and transferred to the grower barn can all be used as incentive criteria. It is simpler, and hence probably more effective to lump all these into one factor such as pigs weaned and transferred, at a given minimum weight: for example, $1.50 per pig for each pig over 7 per litter that is successfully reared. A reduction of say half this for every pig lost in the nursery would help to stimulate nursery management and reduce the incidence of weaning sickly or weak pigs. death losses. Since they are easy to record, an incentive based on them would be simple to apply. Additional incentives for days to market and feed conversion can be included if the appropriate records are available.

Most important in any team operation is the need for staff to feel that they are a part of the team and that they have real input into planning and management decisions. Staff should hold regular meetings (weekly, bi-weekly or monthly) to discuss and evaluate production records and to plan for any changes. The frequency of these meetings is related to the amount of work load involved. Schedule herd health discussions at which staff should be present at least part of the time, to coincide with the herd health visits. On a large unit they should be at least every three weeks.

Week No. 5

Weekly Barn Record

Date November 28, 1988

Table 1. Weekly Barn Record

	Sows				Pigs			Deaths		No.	Daily Inventory				
	First Breeding	Repeat Breeding	Farrowed	Weaned	Live Born	Still Born	Weaned	Farrowing (F) Nursery (N)	Sows (S) Boars (B)	Sold or Trans-ferred	Boars	Sows	Pigs in Farrow-ing (F)	Pigs in Nursery (N)	Comments
Totals forward from last week	32	6	42	41	382	38	338	70 F 22 N	1 S B	445 4(s)	16	310	380	760	445 trans. to feeder 4 sows mkt
MONDAY	1		4		41	1		4 F N	S B		16	310	417	760	
TUESDAY	5	1	6		58	2		1 F 1 N	S B		16	310	474	759	
WEDNESDAY	4		3		30	1		2 F N	S B	120	16	310	502	639	120 to feeder barn
THURSDAY	6		2	16	15		139	F N	1 S B		16	309	378	778	1 sow died in gest. heart?
FRIDAY	1	1	2		7	6		F N	S B		16	309	385	778	
SATURDAY	1							F N	S B		16	309	385	778	
SUNDAY			2		19	1		2 F N	S B		16	309	402	778	
WEEKLY TOTAL	18	2	19	16	170	11	139	9 F 1 N	2 S B	120					
TOTAL TO DATE	50	8	61	57	552	49	477	79 F 23 N	2 S B	565 4(s)					
WEEKLY TARGET	18	2	15	15	158	5	138	6 F 2 N	S B	135	17	350			

I. Company Operations and Swine Industry Business

Often the manager of a large operation is also involved in company management. This means that time has to be scheduled for directors meetings, company audits, meetings with the company bankers, etc. A manager also has to be aware of what is going on in the swine industry. Attendance at conferences, seminars and industry meetings can be time well spent.

Table 2. Suggested Routines for Barn Staff in Farrowing, Nursery Areas and Gestation Areas

Daily
- Feed
- Check farrowing rooms, attend new litters, teeth, tail and iron routines.
- Health checks, with treatments, vaccinations, etc.
- Check breeding areas for sows in heat, especially repeaters.
- Wash passageways, sweep service area, tidy up.
- Maintain record sheets or computer cards.

Weekly
- Monday staff meetings to discuss week's program and issue computer work check sheets, where available.
- Thursday: wean sows as required. This minimizes breedings over the weekend. Deworm and vaccinate for erysipelas. Note: Some units now wean on both Tuesday and Thursday. Splitting weaning days gives better control of breedings.
- Monday or Tuesday: bring new sows into farrowing areas.
- Tuesday: move weaners to grow-finisher area.
- Clean and disinfect all vacant pens as they become available.
- Clean outside areas, death pit, garbage, etc.

Table 3. Suggested Routines for Feeder Barn Staff.

Daily
- Feed
- Check for sick pigs, remove them to sick pens and treat as required.
- Sort out odd sized pigs as required, either to sick pens or same sized groups.
- Check feed and water system.
- Check sewer systems.
- Maintain records.

Weekly
- Weigh and sort pigs for market.
- Prepare pens for new weaner intake.
- Sort incoming weaners by size.
- Weekly production meetings.
- Clean barn areas, death pits, etc.
- Summarize weekly records, update computer records, etc.

For further information, contact:
Regional Swine Specialist
Agriculture Centre
Lethbridge, Alberta T1J 4C7
Phone 381-5108

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